

Basic Tools For the Do-It-Yourself Landowner

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"Sweat equity" is a term used to describe one's investment of hard work in a project rather than simply money. Habitat for Humanity, for example, uses sweat equity hours as a factor to determine which applicant receives the next low-interest home. The theory, and it is a sound one, is that physical labor demonstrates commitment and commitment instills pride of ownership.

Many Alabama landowners know first-hand the meaning of sweat equity because they've invested many, many hours marking boundaries, planting seedlings and completing other aspects of successful forest management. The purpose of this article is to offer active landowners a little guidance for selecting equipment they can easily use with a little practice.

Before you make any decisions, however, get a written forest management plan. Assistance is available through several government service agencies at no cost. Field agents will help you determine your management goals and advise you on ways to accomplish them.

Once your management plan is in hand, you may want to mark property lines, stand boundaries, trees to be saved,



Jim Jeter, forest management specialist for the Northwest Region, demonstrates an increment borer for a landowner.

trees to be removed, harvest boundaries, hazardous areas, etc. A cruiser compass is a must for this. The once-simple compass is now available in styles that float, record temperatures and even glow in the dark. Some models include a built-in cli-

nometer, protractor, level and safety whistle. A popular choice for a basic compass is the Silva Ranger which sells for around \$45.

To mark boundaries, paint guns and plastic flagging are relatively cheap, easy to use and durable. Plastic flagging is ideal for surveying, orienteering or landscaping. Available in bright solid colors or bright colors with special lettering, most flagging tape is designed to hold up under extreme weather conditions. There is a new biodegradable tape available at a slightly higher cost designed to disintegrate in one year. Price range \$1.60 - \$1.95 per roll.

Small handheld paint guns connect directly to the paint can save time, paint and labor. A lightweight alternative to backpack sprayers, the paint gun is accurate in thick brush, easy to operate and decreases hand fatigue. Both methods are excel-

lent for identifying individual trees for thinning operations.

To plan a cutting operation, the landowner should understand the diameter, height, and growth rate of individual trees and stands. A combination log-

ger's/diameter tape is ideal for use on construction, mill and logging sites. It measures the length of the tree on one side and the diameter of the tree on the other side, and is designed to make direct measurements in one reading. Prices vary depending on tape length from around \$50 for a 50-foot tape to \$75 for a 100-foot tape.

A standard 12-inch increment borer is a useful tool for measuring the growth of your trees. The borer extracts a small (4.3 mm to 5mm) core sampling of the tree that allows you to count the tree's rings. The process does not harm a healthy tree. Average price is \$155.00. Replacement extractors are around \$18.00 and replacement bits are in the \$118.00 range.

Millions of trees are planted each year in Alabama and the landowners plant a substantial number. Successful planters know that seedling roots must be straight in the hole, not twisted, balled or planted in a "J", "U" or excessively "L" shaped manner. The proper tool for hand planting is a dibble bar. A dibble bar is typically a flat, 10 X 3-inch steel blade on a steel bar used to plant pine seedlings. There are also triangular shaped blades for rocky soils and specially designed dibbles for containerized seedlings. Price range \$25-\$55.

Tree planting bags are 12-18" deep bags used to carry seedlings while planting. Some are made of canvas and others are nylon coated with neoprene to reflect heat. They may be worn on a shoulder strap with leg-ties or around the lower back to distribute the weight on the wearer's hips. Price range \$22 - \$27.



A good quality cruiser's compass is a standard tool for forest owners.




A combination loggers-diameter tape easily measures this tree's diameter at 15 1/2 inches.

Commercial pruning is gaining popularity as a means of increasing the amount of clear wood produced by selected trees. Most of the volume of a given tree is in the first sixteen feet, commonly called the butt log. Removing limbs while a tree is young produces more wood free of knots and other blemishes in the butt log, thereby bringing a higher market price. Pruning saws run from \$22 - \$45 or higher depending on the features. Adding a telescoping pole to the saw price will add another \$80 - \$110 to the overall price.

A lightweight, durable backpack sprayer can be used in any application – agriculture, horticulture, lawn and garden, woodlands, orchards and pest control. They feature 3, 4, or 5-gallon tanks with spraying wands. Price range \$90 - \$120. Look for chemical and stress resistant tanks, padded shoulder straps and features to prevent spray from drifting.

Safety should always come first when working outdoors. A hardhat, protective eyewear, tick repellent, snake/brush leggings, sturdy work gloves and boots, a blaze orange cap or vest, and a first aid kit are essential.

By becoming a "hands-on" landowner you will save money, learn more about forest management and be better prepared to make informed decisions about

your forestland. Just remember, Alabama's humidity gives a whole new dimension to the term "sweat equity," so remember to pack a jug of cold water or sports drink each time you head to the woods. 

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